

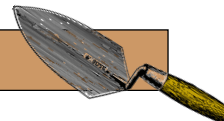


# Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



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## Group News

January's AGM was probably the best-attended ever - we needed extra chairs in the Supper Room! Martin Railton talked about last year's dramatic discoveries on Brackenber, and Richard Stevens spoke entertainingly about his search for a lost church at Holm Cultram. Members also witnessed a major change-round in personnel. Phyllis Rouston, our hard-working secretary, has now become our Chair, taking over from Richard Stevens who had reached the five-year limit on his term of office. Richard, in turn, took over from Phyl and is our new secretary. On the back page of this Newsletter you'll find an open letter from Phyl laying out her aims for the group.

So we started the year with quite a bang and it looks as if things will continue in the same vein.

On Saturday, March 31<sup>st</sup> we have our field-walking day to look forward to - details from Richard on 01228 558794 if you've not already booked.

We also plan to carry out another phase of research on Brackenber Moor this summer. If you'd like to be involved please use the enclosed survey form so that we can get an idea of what people would most like to do.

And, finally, we have drawn up a full programme of summer walks which we trust will keep you both well-exercised and comprehensively entertained. So get those boots out from where you left them last autumn - but do remember to give them a good coat of fresh waterproofing as I expect our traditional luck with the weather will still be following us around!

Best wishes, *Martin Joyce*

## Castle Crag, Mardale

The Lake District teems with "Castle Crag" and quite a few of them do actually feature castles, or at least hill-forts. One of the most interesting, I think, lies beneath Birks Crag on the western shore of Haweswater.

I revisited this site on a lovely sunny day last month and was instantly reminded what a truly scary, atmospheric place it is. The hillfort is defended on three sides by steep/vertical hillsides and on the fourth, where a neck of land joins the site to the fellside of Lady's Seat, two parallel rock-cut ditches bar the way. The second of these features

an inner drystone retaining wall.

A ferociously-steep bank behind leads to a tiny living-platform scooped into the summit. This platform seems to have been protected by one further, final wall, right on the summit itself.

The abiding impression here is of breathlessness. The site should really be called something like "the Castle of the Winds" as every gust of heaven seems to blow around it. The spectacle of the soaring crags above and the stomach-churning drops below combines with the battering from



## Scaling the battlements of Castle Crag, Mardale

the wind to induce a sort of panic. There are enormous views down Haweswater from here but you're never tempted to stay long to enjoy them.

The site was apparently excavated in the 1920s and was declared to be Iron Age. Somehow it feels more recent. Certainly whoever lived here must have been desperate! If you're tempted to visit, an approach from Lady's Seat is recommended.

If you're coming from the higher fells, make sure you visit the tumulus on Low Raise on the way down too. Interestingly, this has a twin on Selside Pike on the other side of Haweswater.

*Martin Joyce*

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## Ancient Ways to the Great Langdale Axe Factories

On Tuesday 14 February, 35 members of the Appleby Archaeology Group welcomed Mr Gabriel Blamires, an independent antiquarian and historian living in Cumbria for the last 30 years, to describe the latest findings of his research into possible routeways to and from the famous Neolithic stone axe working sites in the Great Langdale area of the Lake District.

Archaeologists such as Clare Fell and RG Plint had in the past identified various megaliths or large blocks of stone as likely waymarkers along inferred routes from known production sites of rough stone axes on Scafell Pike and the Langdale Pikes to the coastal and lowland processing sites where these 'roughs' were polished into the finished articles.

Evidence of polishing near sources of sandstone has been



### *Possible guidestone in the English Lake District*

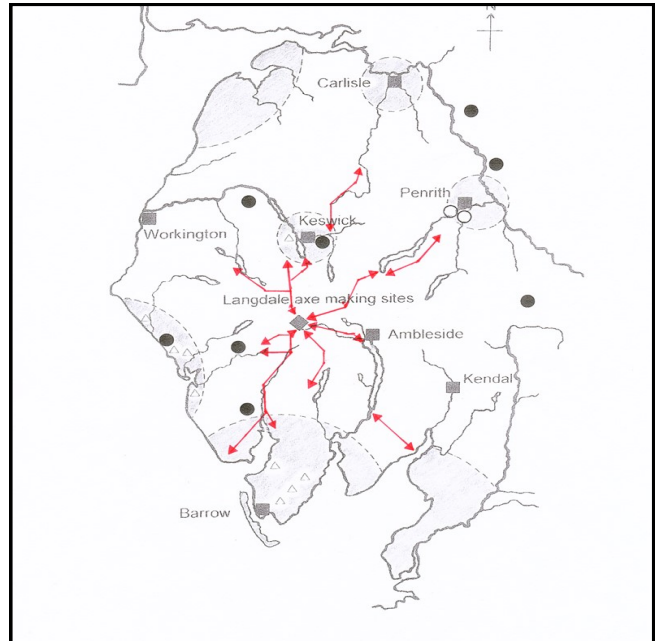
found in several sites around the periphery of the Lake District, on the Cumbrian coast and near Penrith and Keswick. Comparing the locations of these sites with a distribution map of polished axe finds throughout the UK has allowed Gabriel to postulate an extended network of paths radiating outwards from Great Langdale Valley, and to locate and document along these routes many more large blocks of stone than had previously been recognised.

These he interprets as distinctively shaped and strategically-placed megaliths which he believes were used as guidestones by people seeking and transporting stone axes for destinations concentrated in southern Scotland, Northumbria, North and East Yorkshire, the Trent Valley and the Thames Valley, as well as continental Europe.

Stone axes were produced for 1200 years, between 3800

and 2600BC, and it is thought that their distribution may relate to rock art sites and early stone circles in and around the Lake District. The large body of Gabriel's accumulating evidence was supported by his stunning photography along the hypothetical access routes, which follow the natural geography along but usually above the valley floor, occasionally crossing over passes.

The megaliths occur where frost-shatter or glacial debris are possible origins, but their distinctive shapes (triangle, lozenge, pentagon, longstone) echo common megalith shapes seen in stone circles; and their distinctive locations



### *Gabriel's conjectured trackways*

seem deliberately selected to be memorable.

They may reflect crude splitting of rocks to create directional shapes, separated and manipulated into position, if not brought from elsewhere, supporting their interpretation as waymarkers, and justifying their description as signposts.

However, while it is not yet known exactly how far they owe their present shapes and dispositions to the activities of man, the audience warmly applauded the presentation of this innovative research, after which Gabriel agreed to answer questions.

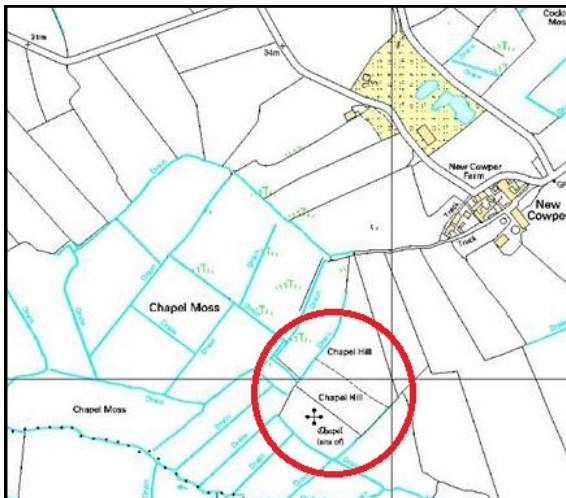
*Stephen Walker*



## An outlying Chapel at Holm Cultram

At January's AGM the retiring Chairman, Richard Stevens, talked about his part in the search for a mediaeval chapel in West Cumbria. He explained that he had joined the West Cumbria Archaeological Society in 2010 after reading about the excavations at Holm Cultram Abbey, and that the 4 year Abbeytown Project, which had been carried out in conjunction with Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd., had recently been completed by a search for one of the outlying chapels belonging to the Abbey.

The search had begun in the County Record Office, where



*The initial area of search around NY 119 449*

documents describing the locations of 8 such chapels were found. Most have now disappeared and it was for one of these missing chapels that the Society had decided to search. It was known that the chapel, St. Cuthbert's, was in the vicinity of New Cowper Farm near Westnewton and that there were clues in the fieldnames – Chapel Hill, Chapel Fields and Chapel Moss were easily identifiable. The research had shown that the only remaining sign of the chapel in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a scatter of stone chippings and in fact the last reference to the chapel as a complete building was after the dissolution in 1552, when it was cared for by a hermit. However, no excavation had ever been tried and so the Society had decided to dig on the site.

The work started by carrying out a detailed geophysical survey, initially of the field where the chapel site is marked on the Historic Environment Record. Having found no sign of anything resembling a building here, the survey was extended to the adjacent fields and in total, almost 100 20m squares were eventually surveyed, the resulting plots being available for the volunteers to see each day.

Strong magnetic anomalies were found in two of the fields and excavation trenches were dug to investigate the source

of the signals. In one trench, large amounts of slag, haematite and in-situ burning were discovered, suggesting that iron working had been carried out. This trench had provided a useful piece of dating evidence in the form of a small piece of mediaeval pot.

In the second field to be surveyed a large, semi-circular feature with a possible defended entrance and several radiating linear features were seen in the plots, as well as a number of further magnetic anomalies. Trenches were excavated over all these signals - in fact no fewer than twelve were eventually opened during the two weeks of the project.

Two sections through the semi-circular ditch were excavated, one of which showed signs of burning in the top of the fill and this had been the source of one of the strong magnetic signals. In the second of these sectional excavations a piece of dressed sandstone was discovered. The stone had been cut square at one corner and was the only artefact recovered which could be readily associated with a stone building.

An extension to one of these trenches was excavated in the closing days of the project and it revealed an arrangement of stones which could have been packing for a wooden post. A fragment of circular, worked and perforated stone was found nearby.

Richard ended his talk by presenting the conclusions from the project. The original sources in the Record Office had pointed out that many ancient dressed stones were to be seen in the farmhouse and barns at New Cowper. With the



*Volunteers remove turf from a new trench*

exception of a single piece of worked stone, no such remains were found on the site, so it appears that if indeed the chapel had been a stone construction, the building was dismantled and the stone reused some time after 1552. It is however just possible that the building might have been constructed of wood. There is strong evidence of metal-working around the site and it is known that the Abbot at Holm Cultram had rights to take iron ore at Egremont, so



it's not impossible that small scale smelting may have been carried out on the site by the monks. St. Cuthbert's chapel might indeed have been built on the site because monks were working there and needed a chapel for their devotions - but this is conjecture.

The semi-circular and linear ditches discovered resemble a typical prehistoric field system and organic samples taken from the ditches have been sent away for Carbon 14 analysis. The results are eagerly awaited by the members of the Society.

*Richard Stevens*

### A word from the new Chair

Sixteen years ago I walked into Brambles Wholefoods in Appleby to ask Martin Railton about the formation of an archaeology group in Appleby. I came out as their first secretary and until this January the only one!

I now find myself in the position of your chairman, a role I am proud to take on.

From our early beginning as a small group we now have a membership of over sixty and I follow in the footsteps of three excellent chairmen. Martin Railton, with his friendly enthusiasm and teaching skills, established an enthusiastic and active group. Harry Hawkins followed and put us on the map by promoting two conferences and encouraging us to get out and about by undertaking several landscape studies. During Richard Stevens' tenure a further conference was held but our emphasis now moved to research. Richard's skill at sorting out grant applications and achieving funding has been a great asset.

I take on the role at a time when the membership is thriving and the potential research programme is exciting.

I aim, with your help, to continue to provide an interesting and informative lecture programme and enjoyable summer events. I see our research activities as very important. These will include opportunities for field walking, geophysical surveys and further excavation on Brackenber Moor as part of the Altogether Archaeology Project.

I hope there is something for every one. I look forward to the next five years.

*Phyl Rouston*

## Spring Programme

### The Northumberland and Durham Rock Art Project

**7.30pm, Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> March**

Dr Ken Fairless and Jeff Lynn

### An Update on "Altogether Archaeology"

**7.30 pm, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> April**

Paul Frodsham, Historic Environment Officer, North Pennines AONB Partnership

### An evening walk to Ninekirks

**Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May**

Another look at the church and settlement at Ninekirks. Meet at 6.30pm at the small car park opposite Whinfell farm on the A66 at NY558 289.

Leader Tony Greenwood, tel 017683 62831

### An evening stroll in Mallerstang

**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> June**

A walk over Birkett Common to examine a possible prehistoric settlement site and other historic remains. On the way home we plan to explore nearby Pendragon Castle. Park near quarry at NY 773 033 at 6.30pm.

Boots are advised. Contact Stephen Walker on 017683 74824 for details.

### Day trip to Hornby Castle

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July**

Site visit & conducted tour of excavations at Hornby Castle by Erik Matthews.

This will be a full day car sharing trip from Appleby to the site in North Yorkshire. Please contact Richard Stevens at [app.arch@richardstevens.plus.com](mailto:app.arch@richardstevens.plus.com) or on 01228 558794 if you would like to come along.

Please be aware that this is an active excavation site where the facilities are basic. A packed lunch and suitable clothing are advised



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